

HOME GROUP BIBLE STUDIES: CHRIST'S GLORIOUS CHURCH

1. The Church – God's Saved People

Aim: To help us appreciate the Lord's church and its establishment.

Discuss: People have such contrasting views on church. The word *church* can bring up painful memories. For others, *church* is merely a building associated with certain practices/programs. *[Discuss]*
In the New Testament, the Greek word for church is ekklesia. The original meaning is "called out ones". Its common meaning is "assembling together (of believers)". So, what is church?

Church is not a building; even our new build is not "church". Nor is it performing certain programs and practices. It's the assembling together of people who have been called out of this world to be God's people through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10). Church is when we gather together in Jesus' name.

In this home group series on "Christ's Church", we will be considering *church* and what *church* is meant to be about, according to God and His Word. *What do you think church should be about? [Discuss]*

The Establishment of the First Church: (Acts 2:1-4; 32-40)

When and how was the first church established? (Acts 2:1-4)

After Christ's atoning death and His resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the lives of His followers on the Day of Pentecost – on that day the church was born.

Before His ascension, in Acts 1:4-8, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit. What do we learn?

The Spirit was promised by God the Father (Ezek 36:27), and even Jesus affirmed this promise during His earthly ministry (John 14:16-18). He would come and give power to Christ's followers to proclaim Christ's name to the world. He also would bless and give spiritual life (cf. John 7:37-39; Rom 8:11).

When the Spirit first came, how did it happen and what did He do? (Acts 2:1-4; 11)

He came powerfully and supernaturally for all to see and observe. The disciples of Jesus spoke in unlearned languages, and in those new languages, others heard them speak of the mighty deeds of God.

What was this a picture and a foretaste of?

It was a picture and a foretaste of how the Gospel (what God has done for us in Christ) would be declared in all the languages of the world to all the people groups of the world so that others might be saved.

With conviction, courage and clarity, the apostle Peter preached the first sermon after the church was born. What was the heart of His message? (Acts 2:22-24, 33-36)

Jesus Christ died according to the will of God (v.23), was raised from the dead by God (v.24), and has been declared by God to be Lord and Christ (our Saviour King).

In order for others to be part of Christ's church (and to be saved from their sins), what did Peter command the crowd to do in Acts 2:37-40? Why?

He commanded them to repent of their sins and be baptised. Through repentance and faith in Christ we are forgiven of our sins and receive the Holy Spirit. We also are commanded to get baptised, not for salvation, but in order to obey Christ (Matt 28:19-20) and to publicly declare our allegiance to Him.

Life in the First Church: (Acts 2:41-47)

On the first day of the church, 3000 people became Christians (Acts 2:41). They became a changed people. What characterised their new life in Christ because of the Holy Spirit? (Acts 2:42)

They became devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

Today what does it practically look like to live out Acts 2:42? What do we normally call this?

It means coming together under the teaching of God's Word (and especially the New Testament), and having fellowship in Jesus' name, having communion (breaking bread), and praying. This is church!

According to Acts 2:43-47, what did the first church look like as they lived out Acts 2:42?

There was a sense of awe toward God as He did miracles through His apostles. Also, being filled with the Spirit, the people were selfless, loving and caring for each other so that no one was in need. They also were one people, gladly meeting together, and worshipping God together. Outsiders were impressed!

In Acts 2:47 what was God doing daily? What enabled God's work to be done unhindered?

God was growing the church; it's His sovereign work (John 6:44). But God loves to use His saved children (His church), with their transformed lives to proclaim to others the reality of Christ. *Do we?*

Summary: God established His church through Christ's work and the empowering of His Spirit. Church should look like Acts 2:42-47 (even without apostles). *How do we compare?*

2. The Church: The Body and Bride of Christ

Aim: To help us learn how God intends for us to function as members in His church.

Discuss: *At the base of the human brain is a small organ called the pituitary gland. By appearances it wouldn't seem to be an important organ. But this tiny gland is a vital regulator, secreting hormones that are critical to the functioning of other organs in the body. With the nervous system it co-ordinates and integrates body mechanisms. In many ways "Every Christian is like a pituitary gland". In what way?* We are part of the body of Christ, and like a pituitary gland in the human body, our service in Christ's body is really important. By attending and encouraging fellow believers, using our spiritual gifts and serving each other in various ways, we bless and help other believers to grow and function well.

The Body of Christ

In 1 Cor 12:12-14, and also v.27, what is the church?

The church is the body of Christ, and each Christian is a member (body part) of Christ's church. The church is not a building, or institution – it is Christ's body that He has given birth to through His Spirit.

Like how each body part has a different function and the whole body relies on individual body parts functioning, what has God done in the body of Christ? (1 Cor 12:4-11)

God has given to each Christian different spiritual gifts/ministries/roles to serve the rest of Christ's body. The rest of the body of Christ relies on us functioning well to maintain health and life in the body of Christ.

Has every genuine Christian (born again) been given a gift(s) from the Spirit? (1 Cor 12:7, 11)

Yes! Every Christian has been given one or more spiritual gifts to use in Christ's body.

What should we keep in mind when we talk about our spiritual gifts? (1 Cor 12:4-6, 11)

Spiritual gifts are a gift from God. We didn't produce them in ourselves. So don't boast, but be thankful.

Why does God give spiritual gifts to Christians in His church? (1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:11-13)

Gifts have been given for the good of the church, and to help equip us and grow us to maturity in Christ.

Can we demand God to give us the gifts we want? (1 Cor 12:11; 14:1)

We can desire spiritual gifts and ask God for certain ones, but what He gives us is according to His will.

Read 1 Cor 12:14-21. What attitude toward ourselves and others are we to guard against?

In regard to ourselves we are not to think that our gift(s) is unimportant. Every gift has been given by God for a noble purpose. Also, toward others, we are not to despise or covet the gifts that others have.

What reassurance do we have when we don't feel very important in the church? (1 Cor 12:22-25)

God has given the seemingly insignificant gifts/roles in Christ's church greater honour.

According to 1 Cor 12:25-26, why has God done things the way He has?

He has done things in such a way so that there may be unity, care, and equal concern for each other.

Based on 1 Cor 12, what conclusion should we draw?

We all have gifts/ministries/roles that God wants us to use/do for His service and to benefit each other.

The Bride of Christ

Besides the church being the "body of Christ", how else is the church described in Rev 19:7-9?

The church is the bride of Christ, and one day in glory there will be the marriage of the Lamb to His bride.

In Eph 5:22-33 what illustration does Paul use when writing about Christian marriage? Why?

The illustration of Christ and the church is used for marriage, because the relationship between Christ and His church is like a marriage; indeed, it is a marriage – the highest one of all.

How does Christ relate to His bride, the church? (Eph 5:23, 25-32)

He is the head of the church, and as the head, He loves us and gave Himself for us (at the cross), in order to cleanse us from sin, and to make us right and glorious. We are also His body, and are one with Him now.

How are we, the bride of Christ and the body of Christ, to relate to Christ? (Eph 5:22-24)

We are to submit ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ, honouring and respecting Him as our Head.

In submitting to Christ, out of reverence for Him, how are we to relate to each other? (Eph 5:21)

We are to submit to one another (to the members of His body). This means serving one another above ourselves, and using our gifts and abilities to bless and help one another. Do we live this out?

Summary: The church is not an organisation but a living entity; we are the body of Christ and the bride of Christ. It breathes with God's Spirit, grows by God's design, and functions through the gifts God has given to it. Christ wants all the members of His body to be active in serving one another.

3. The Church: The House of God

Aim: To help us understand how the church is a spiritual building held together in and by Christ.

Discuss: *A single brick, by itself, is useless. It’s even a nuisance; left on a path it may trip up a person. But a brick properly positioned with other bricks, according to a master design, can result in a useful and impressive structure. How does this analogy relate to Christ’s Church? (Read 1 Pet 2:5)*

The church is a spiritual building where every Christian is a brick (stone) in that building. Just as every brick in a building has a place and a part to play in the overall structure, every Christian has a place and a part to play in Christ’s church. When we go it alone, we are ineffective, and cause the church to be lacking. When we connect and work with others, we help each other fulfil God’s purpose and build His church (cf. also a useful and impressive structure would not look right if one single brick was missing).

Living Stones (1 Peter 2:4-10)

Once we were dead stones, and we were not part of God’s spiritual house (not part of His church). How do we become “living stones” in God’s house? (1 Pet 2:4-5)

We must come to Jesus, the Living Stone who gives spiritual life to us “dead stones”. By coming to Jesus, and through His Spirit, we are made into “living stones” and become part of God’s spiritual house.

What is significant about the church being called a “spiritual house” in 1 Pet 2:5?

We are now God’s temple (spiritual house) here on earth; no longer is it a grand physical building like in the Old Testament. As God dwelt in the temple of old, now He dwells in His people (His spiritual house). Also, in this house we find shelter and security and are spiritually nurtured. This is the church.

Consider the service in the temple in the Old Testament period. What is the service that is to be done in the new spiritual house (temple) that God has established in Christ (ie, the church)? (1 Pet 2:5)

In the Old Testament, the temple was the place where priests ministered to God and the people, and offered up physical sacrifices to atone for sin and to thank God. Now, as God’s new spiritual house (temple) we are all to serve as priests, ministering to God and to each other. Together we offer up spiritual sacrifices, not physical sacrifices, which include the worship of God and service to Him and His people.

What’s the connection between Jesus and this new building God has established? (1 Pet 2:4,6)

God has made His Son the “choice stone” and “cornerstone” of His house; the church. These terms are used for the first stone laid in a building. It’s the most perfect, true and strong stone, and from it a building is built. What a picture of Christ! Jesus is the perfect Son of God, who is true and strong, and through His death and resurrection, God has made Him the cornerstone of His house. As we come to Him and line up our life with Him (making Jesus our Lord and Saviour), we become part of God’s building.

How does God view this “cornerstone”? How should we? (1 Pet 2:4,6)

God views Jesus as precious and choice. Though many reject Christ, we are to view Him as God does. He is precious, and we are to come to Him and believe in Him. All who do will never be disappointed.

What does it say in 1 Peter 2:7-8 about those who have not come to Jesus and believed in Him?

They are not part of God’s house. By rejecting Jesus, one day they will stumble and fall into eternal ruin.

What purpose does God have for His church? (1 Peter 2:9-10)

As God’s chosen and special people, we are to proclaim the glory and greatness of our God to others. We ought to do this all the more because of what God has done for us and what He has made us into.

The Mortar (Ephesians 4:1-16)

We are living stones in God’s house, but what’s the “mortar” that holds us together? (Eph 4:4-6)

We are one – one body through one Spirit in us. We have one Lord, one faith, one hope, one Father.

As living stones, how can we practically contribute to having “mortar” to hold us? (Eph 4:1-3)

We are to be Christ-like toward each other; humble, gentle, patient, and bearing with one another in love.

What else contributes to our unity, and creates the “mortar” amongst us? (Eph 4:7-16)

Christ has given us, by His Spirit, spiritual gifts and various ministries. It’s what we supply to each other through our gifts and service under His Lordship that helps hold us together. Ultimately, Christ (v.16) is the One who fits us and holds us together, as we submit to His Lordship and serve Him.

When we all contribute and have spiritual gifts functioning, what blessings occur? (Eph 4:13-16)

We have unity, maturity, security and love. We won’t collapse or crumble; even from attack or opposition.

Summary: We are living stones that are to be together so that God can build His church.

4. The Church: Contributing or Consuming?

Aim: To examine three attitudes amongst Christians that contribute to the church's shortcomings: Self-sufficiency, consumerism, and "minister does all".

Discuss: You have had enough paying for expensive tools every time you want to do a job around your house. So you come up with a plan. You call your neighbours together and suggest that they start a tool-lending service. They enthusiastically agree. On the first weekend, your neighbours take your tools for things they need to do. As a result, you wait until next weekend to do your jobs. But by next weekend no one returns your tools. They don't even lend their tools to you. There is no "giving"; only "taking".

Consider when the "taking" attitude is dominant in a church, rather than "giving". What results?

This study will examine some of the church's shortcomings in the light of how we should be.

Qualities of the New Testament Church

Read Acts 2:44-47 and Acts 4:32-37. What things characterised the New Testament church?

They shared what they had with other believers, they cared for those in need, they loved to be together, they had one heart and mind, and they loved praising God, enjoying gladness, sincerity and God's grace.

How does the modern-day church compare with the New Testament church?

The church, in general, does not have the same enthusiasm and dedication for fellowship, sharing with others, caring for the poor and helpless, and being one (or working at being one) with other believers.

Why does the church today fall short of the standard set by the New Testament church?

One reason is that we have allowed the world to influence us, rather than Christ. The world encourages the promotion of self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and a "take all" attitude. Christ doesn't (Mark 10:42-45).

Enemies of the Modern Church:

1. The Self-Sufficiency Attitude

In what way has self-sufficiency in our culture affected us?

Self-sufficiency encourages us to believe that depending on others is a sign of weakness, that we should own our own things rather than borrow, that success is the absence of need and the protection against any economic/personal crisis. Many of us have achieved self-sufficiency, but the accompanying attitudes have led us to be tight-fisted, viewing our possessions as being our own, and using them only for ourselves.

Read Acts 4:32-37 again. How did the first Christians regard their possessions?

They shared their possessions so that no one was in need. The needy were esteemed; not demeaned.

What are some important changes we need to make to stop the "self-sufficiency" epidemic?

We need to realise that our possessions are the Lord's, and that we are to be good tenants of what He has given us (1 Cor 4:7; Luke 16:10-13). We are to share our possessions with others; especially the needy.

2. The Consumerism Attitude

Many Christians attend church with a wrong attitude. What attitude is this?

They go for the purpose of what they can get out of it; stimulation, entertainment, a "pick me-up", etc.

Why is the consumerism attitude prevalent among so many Christians?

We have allowed our fallen nature to influence our thinking so that we view church in regard to how it will satisfy our desires/wants. Also, the influence of the world will drive us to this attitude.

What happens if we have a consumerism attitude and don't get what we want?

We often go elsewhere. We have no desire to stay and help a church, through service and contribution.

When we are dominated by consumerism, what important Christian attitudes are missing?

We are not "other" focussed, giving and serving others, as we have been taught (John 13:12-17; Phil 2:1-8).

What change can we make so that we become a serving, giving and contributing Christian?

We need to fix our eyes on Jesus and follow His example – He gave Himself and served us (Mark 10:45).

3. The "Minister does all" Attitude

Another damaging attitude in church is the "minister does all" one. Where does it come from?

It comes from wrong thinking: "the minister is paid to do the work". It comes from wrong priorities: "I'm too busy to serve, so the paid minister will do it". It comes from bad ministers: "I'm the only one able".

Read Ephesians 4:11-13. What's the role of church leaders (ministers)?

They are to use their God-given gifts to equip God's people for ministry. They are not called to do it all.

Is God using me and my gifts to benefit the local church? Am I involved in the Lord's work?

Summary: Your church will be a better place if you contribute to it rather than take from it.

5. The Church: In Need of Encouragers

Aim: To help us encourage one another and build up the body of Christ.

Discuss: We know times in our lives when another person's words have helped encourage us to go on, or helped us through a trying situation, or bolstered our self-worth. Can you give any examples?

The New Testament has many examples of believers caring for and encouraging one another in the faith. We all need to develop caring hearts and people-oriented outlooks that will enable us to encourage one another and build up the body of Christ. We've all heard that a chain is as strong as its weakest link. When we don't encourage, we become a weak link and cause the chain to break.

Examples of Encouragement

Read Acts 4:36-37. What was Joseph renamed and why?

He was named Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement" for he was a great encourager. In these verses we see him selling land so that the apostles might use the money to help encourage the poor.

In Acts 9:26-27 what do we find Barnabas doing?

He helped the Jerusalem church receive Paul as a true brother in Christ. Initially, they weren't willing to receive Paul, because he had been a persecutor. But Barnabas made it happen through encouragement.

What was the problem in Acts 15:36-40, and what did Barnabas do to rectify it?

There was a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over Mark. Barnabas chose to encourage Mark by taking him under his wing. Mark could so easily have become disheartened, but he ended up going on with the Lord, and even becoming a great help to Paul (2 Tim 4:11).

Read Acts 18:24-28. How was Apollos assisted by the Christians in Ephesus?

Priscilla and Aquila didn't oppose Apollos because of how his teaching was lacking to some degree, but they encouraged him in "the way of God more accurately". Also, when Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the Ephesian church encouraged him to go, and they encouraged the church in Achaia to receive him.

What resulted from Apollos' visit to Achaia?

He was a great help, encouraging the believers in the Lord, and standing up to the Jews who were opposing them and blaspheming the name of Christ.

What principles about encouragement can we deduce from the readings in the book of Acts?

Encouragement causes those in need to be helped, it brings about unity, it prevents us from giving up, it helps us be fruitful for the kingdom, and it inspires others to be encouragers as well.

Teaching on Encouragement

Read Phil 2:1-4. What encouragement do we receive by being united to Christ? (v. 1)

We receive the comfort of His love, the fellowship of the Spirit, and His tenderness and compassion.

Christ encourages us, but how are we to be an encouragement to one another? (v. 2)

We are to be an encouragement to one another by being united in mind, spirit and purpose, and by maintaining Christ's love toward each other. Through love and unity, we are enabled to have a real sense of belonging and worth before God and each other – what a source of great encouragement.

What does it practically mean to live out Phil 2:2?

It means not letting things get between us, and getting alongside each other to help one another.

In v.3, what does Paul warn against? Why?

He warns against self-centredness that cause others to be humiliated, put down, neglected, and to eventually be discouraged. It does nothing to build up and maintain the unity of the body of Christ.

Instead, what is every Christian called to do? (vv. 3-4)

We are to clothe ourselves with humility, which practically means considering every other believer more important than ourselves, and not looking to our own interests, but the interests of others.

Read 1 Thess 5:11-14. What practical things do we learn about encouragement in this passage?

We are urged to build one another up, to encourage the leaders, to be at peace with each another, to encourage the feeble, to help the weak, and to be patient to all. What a great passage to live out!

Tests in Encouragement

Consider your conversations. Do you talk more about yourself, or listen and take an interest in others?

Consider your attitudes. Do you criticise fellow believers, or do you express your appreciation for them?

Consider your prayers. Do you pray positively for fellow believers, thanking God for them?

Summary: Encourage and build up the body of Christ, by being other-centred and humble.

6. The Church: A People Who Meet Together

Aim: To help encourage us to meet together regularly and to be a blessing to each other.

Discuss: A pastor visited a man in his congregation, who attended church rarely; always finding excuses for not attending. On a cold winter’s day, after entering the man’s home, the pastor walked over to the fireplace, picked up the tongs, and removed a coal from the fire. He then placed it by itself on the hearth. The man thought his actions strange, but as they talked, the pastor’s actions hit home. If we choose not to have fellowship, we will become like that removed coal – cold! Also, by not having fellowship, we reduce the warmth and heat of the remaining coals in the fire. We are “living coals,” designed by God to burn brightly when brought together in close association (ie, in church). *[Discuss]*

Fellowship at the Start of the Church

Read Acts 2:42. What characterised the first believers?

The first believers were **continually devoted** to four key practices; apostle’s teaching (which became the New Testament), to fellowship, to breaking of bread (communion with fellowship meals), and to prayer.

In Acts 2:42 fellowship is mentioned as most important. What did it look like? (Acts 2:43-47)

The first believers met regularly and even daily. They were constantly caring for each other, sharing meals together, and praising God together. Their fellowship was vibrant and practical.

What caused the first believers to have a heart for fellowship?

The Holy Spirit had filled their lives and given them such a strong sense that they were now in God’s family. Though we are saved individually, once saved, we become part of God’s saved people *[discuss]*.

Fellowship Here and Now

Fellowship was not just designed by God to help believers at the start of the church. It is to be our constant practice until Christ returns. What do we learn in Heb 10:25?

We are not to forsake fellowship – meeting together in Jesus’ name. Sadly, as time went on, some began to no longer meet, and so the Hebrew writer had to challenge Christians not to continue this bad practice.

There are many, today, who call themselves a Christian, and who don’t go to church. What are the common excuses given? Were you ever a person who didn’t have fellowship for a time. Why?

There are many reasons why we might choose not to have fellowship; eg, tiredness, lack of commitment, wrong priorities, personal conflicts with others in a church, don’t get anything out of church, etc.

For Christians who don’t have fellowship, how do you think it will go when they give an account of their life before Jesus one day? Will Jesus be tolerant of their reason not to have fellowship?

Jesus commanded us to have fellowship, and the Holy Spirit leads us to have fellowship. There is no excuse. There is no way around Heb 10:25. We are called to have fellowship, and that’s it!

What about if a person doesn’t have fellowship because the church they go to or the churches near them do not preach the truth?

We are still commanded to have fellowship. What we should do is find fellow believers who hold to the truth and meet up with them regularly. We also need to guard our heart from dismissing a church if they don’t come up to our expectations. Perhaps our expectations (and personal biases) are not right. No church is perfect. If key things are in place and the truth is taught, then we ought to have fellowship.

What happens to people who start missing church without any good reason?

It becomes a habit, and finally they don’t come anymore. Then they can lose their fire for the Lord (like a coal removed from a fire), and they can even fall away from the Lord. And don’t forget, this danger of forsaking fellowship is part of the devil’s plan to nullify our Christian service and even shipwreck our faith.

Read Heb 10:24-25? What’s the key to good and right fellowship?

It’s to encourage each other in our Christian walk, and to spur one another on to love and good deeds for Christ’s glory. This can’t happen unless we are catching up with each other and having fellowship.

Besides God’s Spirit encouraging us to have fellowship, why else should we? (cf. Heb 10:25b)

Christ’s glorious return is near, and as we have been taught, the world will become more darker and ungodly (2 Tim 3:1-5). Fellowship is key in helping us to continue on and to persevere (cf. Heb 10:23).

What else should spur us on to the end and to have constant fellowship? (Heb 10:23; Rev 7:15-17)

God is faithful, our hope is sure, and one day we will enjoy fellowship forever in God’s presence.

Summary: **Never forsake fellowship; always encourage and spur one another on in the Lord.**

7. The Church: Accountability in Action

Aim: To help us understand that we are accountable to God and to others in Christ's church.

Discuss: Who are you accountable to? If you are a student, you are accountable to your teacher to do your work. If you are a taxpayer, you are accountable to the government to pay your taxes. Whether we like it or not, everyone is accountable to others. This includes being a Christian.

Who are we accountable to as a Christian?

We are accountable to God, to spiritual leaders in the church, and to fellow believers.

Accountability in church can be challenging. Some are reluctant to allow themselves to be held accountable to other believers. Some even avoid church in order to escape from accountability. Yet such accountability is necessary. *Why?* [It enables the church to function well, and for each individual Christian to remain true to Christ's ways and to be productive and fruitful in their service to God]

Accountability before God

Christ has set us free (Gal 5:1). But how are we to understand our freedom? (Gal 5:13-14)

In Christ we are set free from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13) and from condemnation (Rom 8:1), but this freedom does not negate God's desire for us to serve Christ and His church; ie, being accountable to Him.

What do we learn from 2 Cor 5:10 and Heb 4:13?

One day we will give an account of ourselves before God. Even though we will be spared from being judged for our sins, we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and our deeds will be examined, and we will receive reward according to how we have lived our lives.

Read Matt 25:14-30. What is Jesus teaching us in this parable?

We will give an account of our life before the Lord. To those who have been blessed with much, more shall be required. God is looking for faithfulness in regard to what He has entrusted to us.

Read 1 Cor 3:10-15. What do these verses reveal about our accountability to God?

All of us have been engaged in work since we came to know Christ. One day, God will examine our work, and reward us accordingly. If we haven't served the Lord well, we will be saved ("as through fire") and receive no reward. We should view this as unacceptable; especially after all Christ has done for us.

What do the different materials represent in v. 12?

The costly materials represent work we have done for God's glory with the Spirit; eg, serving the Lord in His church, helping fellow believers, telling others of Jesus. The poorer materials represent fleshly works; ie, pursuing personal interests, or even doing Christian ministry in our own strength and for our own glory.

Read 1 Cor 4:1-5. What do we learn in this passage?

What other people think of us, or what we think of ourselves, is not the main matter. It's what God thinks of us. He will examine us. Therefore, let us live in the light of our accountability to Him.

Accountability before Church Leaders

What responsibility do our church leaders have for us? (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1-4)

They watch over us and shepherd us. They themselves are accountable to God for the flock.

How should we respond to church leadership? (Heb 13:17; 1 Cor 16:15-16)

We are to obey leaders and submit to them. It pleases God that we be accountable to them. Note: We live in a society that does not respect authority. Do we respect and submit to God's appointed leaders?

When we submit to church leaders, what does it result in? Why? (Heb 13:17)

It results in Christian leaders experiencing joy (cf. also 3 John 4), and where we all benefit. Besides not having to experience discipline, we are also spurred on to more fruitful ministry for the Lord.

What are we to do if a church leader is not behaving as they ought (ie, according to the Bible)?

We're not to reject them! We are to confront them and call them to repentance (cf. 1 Tim 5:19-20).

Accountability before Each Other

We are also to be accountable to each other. What does this look like practically? (Jam 5:19-20)

When we see a fellow believer sin, then we are to point out their sin and encourage them to repent.

How can accountability to each other practically occur?

It can happen through one-on-one mentoring/discipleship. Besides reading together God's Word and praying, we can hold each other accountable; eg, in overcoming sins, in reading God's Word, etc.

Summary: We are not free to do whatever we please - we are accountable to God and each other.

8. The Church: Being My Brother's Keeper

Aim: To help us appreciate our responsibility for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Discuss: When Cain said to the Lord, "Am I my brother's keeper?" his sarcasm and lack of concern for his brother were clearly evident. *For us today, are we to be our brother's keeper?* [Yes! Absolutely!]

How awesome it is that the Lord is our keeper (read Psalm 121), but as we shall see from this study, every Christian is called to be their brother's keeper. We are responsible for one another. This is not easy in our culture. *Why?* [Fear and vulnerability can keep us at arm's length from each other, as well as the promotion of self-reliance and independence]

Our Responsibility For Each Other

Read 1 John 3:16-18. What responsibility do we have toward fellow believers?

We are to lay down our life for each other; practically, that means helping each other, even if it costs us. This was the practice of the church in Acts (cf. Acts 4:34-35).

Read Rom 15:1-3. Who are the "strong" and what onus does the Lord place on them?

The "strong" are those who are strong in the Lord and in a good place with Him. Such believers are not to please themselves and turn a blind eye to those struggling. Instead, the Lord gives them the responsibility to help those who are weak and battling; both spiritually and physically. We are to be like the Lord.

When a fellow believer sins, what is our responsibility? (Matt 18:15-17)

We are to point out a fellow believer's fault in private, and to follow the rest of the procedure if he doesn't listen (this applies to sins that can't be overlooked; there are others that can be - Pro 19:11). We are not permitted to do nothing; we have a responsibility to care for each other's spiritual well-being.

Paul also taught about what we're to do when a believer sins. What do we learn in Gal 6:1?

We are to help restore a fellow believer caught in sin by encouraging them to turn away from their sin and to seek forgiveness. But we are to do it with gentleness and compassion; not by being rough and judgmental. We need to remember that we all have the potential to fall ourselves (cf. 1 Cor 10:12).

According to Gal 6:2 we are to bear one another's burdens. What does that look like practically?

When a fellow believer is burdened with trials, or caught in sin, we are to help bear their "load"; ie, we are not to push them down, but lift them up (cf. Psa 37:23-24). We are to encourage them and pray for them, and even help them practically if they have needs (i.e., provide finances, meals, home help, etc).

What responsibility do we have toward each other according to Rom 15:14? What does this mean?

We are to admonish each other; that is, we are to correct each other when we stray or are not living as we ought. This is to be done with a heart full of goodness and godly wisdom (knowledge). Admonishing a fellow believer does not mean "telling them off", or belittling them, or being judgmental of them.

When someone has something against us, what is our responsibility? (Matt 5:23-24)

Even though we may not be in the wrong, God holds us responsible to go to our brother to make peace.

We will not be able to care for and be responsible for each other if we do not have a right heart toward each other. What characteristics do we need to develop? (Col 3:12-14)

Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness and love.

Read Col 3:15-16. What else is essential so that we can truly care for and help each other?

We need Christ's peace to rule our hearts (our emotions) and we need Christ's word to give us wisdom and knowledge. Without these, we will not know how to help each other, or have the right heart to do it.

What's the purpose of being our "brother's keeper" with a right heart toward each other?

The Lord wants love and unity in our fellowship so that we can grow and be nurtured in the faith, and where God is glorified, and where lost souls see the reality of Christ through us.

Our Response to Others

We are responsible for other believers when they sin, but what about when we fall? What attitude do we need to have when a fellow believer lovingly challenges us? (Pro 15:31-33; Pro 13:18; 1 Pet 5:5)

We need to listen to reproof! We need to be humble and teachable; not proud and defensive.

Consider David when he sinned. What would have happened if David didn't listen to Nathan, or if Nathan hadn't obeyed God and challenged David? (2 Sam 12:1-7, 13)

David would have continued to be out of fellowship with God. We all need to listen, take heed and repent.

Summary: We are to be our brother's keeper; for the good of each other and for God's glory.

9. The Church: Being Together

Aim: To help us build good relationships by sharing truthfully and loving each other.

Discuss: *In our society there is a lack of closeness when it comes to relationships. Why is this?* Busy work schedules, outside activities and keeping up with everyday tasks seems to encourage our relationships to be superficial and non-committal. Even the fear of vulnerability through openness keeps us distant from each other. *Discuss: We are becoming a society of people all alone from each other.*

God never intended His church to be like how our society is becoming; cold and superficial (cf. Matt 24:12). We are to share with and love each other. The church can’t be the church without this.

Being Together

In our earlier studies we saw how church ought to be, and how we are to relate to each other, by considering the first church in Acts 2. According to Acts 2:42, what did they devote themselves to?

They were continually devoted to the apostles’ teaching (which is now our New Testaments), to fellowship, to the breaking of bread (remembering Jesus’ death through communion), and to prayer.

The early church devoted themselves to fellowship. What did that look like? (Acts 2:42-46)

They spent time with each other, daily caring for each other and worshipping God together. They even shared meals together. They did not isolate themselves or share superficially. They “hung out” together.

Why should this idea of being together be strong in Christ’s church? (Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:9-10)

We are God’s people, through our faith in Christ. We are part of God’s family; His household. As a result of what we have become, and how we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in each believer, we ought to know and experience strong fellowship with each other – we’re not just a club!

Speaking Together

When we do have strong fellowship with each other, we can then share our lives with each other through communication. How are we to speak to each other? (Eph 4:15)

We are to speak truthfully and we are to speak lovingly to each other.

What does it mean to speak truthfully? (Eph 4:25; Jam 5:12; Gal 6:1)

We are never to lie, distort, or deceive each other. Our “yes” is “yes”, and our “no” is “no” (Jam 5:12). Being truthful also includes sharing the truth with each other regarding correcting one other (Gal 6:1).

We are also to speak lovingly to each other. What does that look like? (Eph 4:29-32)

We are to speak wholesome words to each other that stem from a desire to build up or help one another. We are not to tear down each other, or slander and maliciously align each other.

In Eph 4:29, what does it mean that we are to “give grace” when we speak?

When we speak, we are to be gracious and show favour to each other. The one hearing us should feel loved and honoured; not belittled. We are never to judge and condemn each other (cf. Matt 7:1-5).

Loving Together

Besides being loving in our speech, we are to be loving to each other in our conduct. What did Jesus teach us in regard to this in John 13:34-35?

We are to love each other as He loved us; ie, we are to love each other sacrificially and unconditionally. This is only possible as we allow God’s Spirit to fill us and rule us and produce His love in us (Gal 5:22).

Paul taught the Corinthians how they are to love each other. How important is love? (1 Cor 13:1-3)

Love is more important than all the spiritual gifts we receive through Christ. Love is the key!

What is love? How does Paul describe the love we are to have toward each other in 1 Cor 13:4-8?

We are to be patient, kind, happy for each other, humble, thoughtful, selfless and forgiving. Love embraces righteousness and truth, and it is enduring and hopeful. Love is supreme (1 Cor 13:13).

Read 1 Pet 1:22-23. How are we to love each other? Why can we love like this?

We are to love each other from the heart; ie, deeply. We can do this, only because of how we have been born again. God has and is changing us by His Spirit, so that we might love each other as He loves us.

Read together 1 John 3:16-17 and 1 John 4:7-11. What do we learn about love in these passages?

We are to love each other by laying down our life for each other; ie, it should cost us. We are to love practically, doing what we can to help each other. We are also to love because we are loved of God, and because God is love. Cf. how important it is that we love one another in the light of 1 John 4:19-21.

Summary: Church is where we are to be together, sharing together in truth, and loving each other.

10. The Church: The Importance of Unity

Aim: To help us value the importance of unity in the church and the need to maintain it.

Discuss: In 1858, Abraham Lincoln gave a famous speech entitled "A house divided against itself cannot stand" to his colleagues regarding the abolition of slavery. He knew that if they did not become united in their debate on slavery, then they would fall and be no more. But it was the Lord Jesus who first came up with the phrase (Luke 11:17) in the context of Satan's kingdom. But this phrase so important, also, for Christ's church. *Discuss this statement in relation to us, His church?*

The Prayer and Call for Unity

What do we find Jesus emphasising in His prayer to the Father in John 17:20-23?

Jesus prayed that we may be one with God and each other; and that we might be perfected in unity.

What is so important about our unity according to Jesus' prayer?

Our unity is a vital sign to the world of how Jesus was sent by the Father and that He is God's Son and the Saviour. Our unity is vital in authenticating to the world the reality of Jesus and His Gospel.

Read John 10:14-16. What was Jesus' mission? What did He stress in v.16?

Jesus' mission was to lay down His life for His followers, as well as to bring others (non-Christians) into His kingdom (fold). His mission was to establish **one** fold with **one** shepherd; He emphasised unity.

What do we see emphasised by the apostle Paul in Eph 4:1-3?

Paul emphasised the same thing that our Lord Jesus did; that we, as God's people, are to be one. We are to preserve and maintain our unity. It is something we should be diligent about; ie, put much effort into.

The Basis for Unity

In Eph 4:4-6 what do we learn is the basis of our unity?

There is one body (ie, the church is the one body of Christ), one Holy Spirit dwelling in each believer, we have received the same calling to be God's saved people, we have one Lord Jesus, one common faith, we have been baptized with the same baptism, and we all have one God and Father. What a basis for unity!

Consider the great divides back in the New Testament period; Jews/Gentiles, slaves/freed men, male/female, etc. What has Christ done for His people? (Gal 3:27-28; Eph 2:12-18)

He has broken down all divides to create one people; God's people purchased by Christ's blood (Rev 5:9)

The Battle for Unity

What do we need to be aware of in regard to maintaining unity? (Eph 6:10-13)

The devil wants to divide us so that Christ's church might not stand, but fall. His purpose is so that the church might lose all credibility before the world in regard to our witness of Christ's reality.

How would you evaluate our unity as Christians today? [Discuss] Why is this?

We are not as united as we should be. Besides denominational divides, we often have divisions within a local church. We are often separated from each other by allowing petty doctrinal differences, or cultural differences, or leadership differences, or even different music preferences, to keep us divided.

Our Responsibility to Create Unity

In the light of the Bible's teaching on unity, and our battle to have practical unity, what do we need to do to foster it? (Col 3:12-14; Phil 2:1-4)

We need to be compassionate and humble, forbearing and forgiving each other. We need to be selfless and be considering others more important than ourselves. This behaviour truly fosters unity.

When we are not right with another believer, what are we to do? (Matt 5:23-24)

We are to seek reconciliation and be right with each other (even before Christian service).

What member of our body must we control if we want to maintain unity? (Jam 3:5b-6)

We must control our tongue. We are not to speak against each other (Jam 4:11-12).

What can we learn from the Corinthian church in 1 Cor 1:10-13?

We are not to be divided by following different human leaders; instead, we are all to follow Christ.

What do we need to be aware of according to Acts 20:29-31?

We need to be aware of false teachers; their agenda is not just to lead us astray, but to break our unity.

What do we learn from Rom 16:17?

There can be divisive people in a church; we are not to associate with such people for unity is important.

Read together Psalm 133 and consider God's delight in unity and the joy we should have in unity.

Summary: The unity of the fellowship is to be diligently preserved; it pleases God and blesses us.

11. The Church: A Place to Do Ministry

Aim: To help us understand that ministry in church is to be an essential part of our church life.

Discuss: *How do you feel about doing "ministry" in church? [discuss]*

Some Christians have a negative view of doing "ministry" in church. Why is that?

For some, it has a negative connotation. It means having someone else's agenda forced onto you, or to be doing something you don't want to do, or to be doing things to the point of exhaustion. For others, they have no time to do "ministry"; aren't the pastors paid to do this?

But for other Christians they have a positive view of doing "ministry" in church. Why is that?

They understand they have a heavenly Father who has hand-crafted them with special talents and skills, and who longs for them to engage their talents and skills in His kingdom for His glory and for their joy.

Why can't I just be an attender at church? (1 Cor 12:4-7)

God has so blessed and gifted each genuine Christian so that we would experience the joy of ministering to one another for the common good; and in effect, to be a co-builder with God in His eternal kingdom. It's not enough to merely be an attender of a local church. God wants us to be involved. Through ministry, God fills us with a sense of accomplishment and fulfilment. We have been called to minister to each other.

God's Call to Ministry

How did members of the early church minister to each other? (Acts 2:43-45; 4:32-35)

They shared everything in common, the rich sold their possessions and goods and gave to those with needs, and they met regularly to praise God together and to encourage one other. Ministry was the key.

Read Heb 6:9-13. What was evident in genuine believers?

They worked for and loved the Lord, and that included ministering to and helping fellow believers.

What's the main difference between the sheep and the goats? (Matt 25:31-46)

The difference is what they did and didn't do. The sheep served those in need; the goats didn't.

What should our attitude be in serving? (Col 3:23-24)

As we serve one another, we should serve as best we can, knowing that we ultimately serve the Lord.

How did Jesus challenge our customary ideas of service? (Matt 20:25-28)

Serving others is not a lowly thing, but a thing of greatness in God's eyes. The greatest in the kingdom is the one who serves the most. Jesus is the supreme example of this; He gave Himself for us (Matt 20:28).

How do people in church today serve each other? How do you serve? [discuss]

They share their material blessings with others or for the work of the church. They contribute leadership or provide counsel to other Christians. They assist with special needs or ministries that they are suited for.

Is there any attitude toward serving that you need God to change, so that you might better serve?

Our Attitude to Ministry

How would you summarise the key thoughts from Phil 2:1-4?

Because we are so blessed being in Christ, we ought to put aside any selfish desires, and be humble; treating others better than ourselves.

What prevents us from looking to the interests of others? (Phil 2:3-4)

Our natural inclination is to look at ourselves first, and to consider ourselves before others. Only God's word and His Spirit can enable us to overcome this sinful and insidious trait.

What does it mean that we are to have the same attitude as that of Jesus? (Phil 2:5)

He put aside His glory to serve and redeem us. We are to set aside our self-interests to serve others.

What are some tangible ways in which we can develop these attitudes in our lives?

We can read God's word, and in particular, study Christ's life and follow His example (cf. Phil 2:5-8).

What words capture the attitude modelled by Christ in Phil 2:5-8?

He wasn't a "grasper"; He was humble; He served; He was obedient to God (even if it cost Him).

What do you think it would take for us to be more like Christ, who served us? (John 15:5)

We need to abide in Christ and to have His Spirit fill us so that we might bear fruit for God's glory. We also should pray for ourselves and look for opportunities to serve (cf. Isa 6:8).

What can we do to help others do ministry in the local church? (Heb 10:24-25)

We need to spur one another on to do ministry, as well as to meet up and encourage each other.

Summary: **God has called us to serve and minister to each other; as we do, we serve Him.**

12. The Church: A Place to Exercise Spiritual Gifts

Aim: To show that spiritual gifts are given to every Christian and that they are essential for accomplishing God's work in His church and helping each believer grow in Christ.

Discuss: *Many Christians have lots of questions when it comes to spiritual gifts, such as: What are spiritual gifts? How are we to use our spiritual gifts? What's the difference between spiritual gifts and natural talents? Do spiritual gifts even exist anymore? Why do we often have questions on spiritual gifts?* Many Christians are confused regarding what the Bible teaches about spiritual gifts. We have also been impacted by bad teaching on this subject; especially from some churches who have misused the gifts. In this and subsequent studies we shall consider spiritual gifts in the health and growth of Christ's church.

What are Spiritual Gifts?

How would you describe spiritual gifts to a new Christian?

Spiritual gifts are spiritual abilities for spiritual purposes given by the Holy Spirit to Christians. They are not to be confused with natural talents or abilities that we receive at birth and develop throughout our life.

What does Paul wish for believers regarding spiritual gifts? (1 Cor 12:1)

He doesn't want us to be ignorant or unaware of them. We need to know about them and what they're for.

Amongst Christians, who receives spiritual gifts? (1 Cor 12:4-7)

It's not just pastors or missionaries; we all do. To "each one" God gives spiritual gifts through His Spirit.

How do we decide what spiritual gifts we will receive? (1 Cor 12:11)

We don't decide; God decides and gives the gifts He chooses for each one of us. It's according to His sovereignty and according to His grace. God knows what gifts are needed in each local church.

There are many spiritual gifts. The New Testament doesn't give an exhaustive list of them all.

Which spiritual gifts are listed in 1 Cor 12:8-10, 1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11 and Rom 12:6-8?

1 Cor 12:8-10 (wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing spirits, tongues, interpreting tongues); 1 Cor 12:28 (apostleship, prophecy, teaching, miracles, gifts of healing, helps, administration, tongues); Eph 4:11 (apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastoral care, teaching); Rom 12:6-8 (prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy)

In reality, we all have one or more spiritual gifts? Which are yours?

NB: Many Christians are not aware of the spiritual gifts they have received. By faith, we need to believe that we have been given some, and through being involved in church, we need to discover what they are.

Can we ask for spiritual gifts? (cf. 1 Cor 14:1-3, 13)

Paul encouraged the Corinthian Christians to ask and seek for gifts; eg, gifts that are helpful, such as prophecy. He even urged those who spoke in tongues to pray that they may be able to interpret, as that would benefit God's people. We are therefore to ask, but what we receive is up to God's sovereign will.

Why are Spiritual Gifts Given?

Why does God give us spiritual gifts? (1 Cor 12:7)

God gives us spiritual gifts for the common good. They are not for our benefit, but for other's benefit.

Why hasn't God given all the gifts to one person? (1 Cor 12:12-30)

In His wisdom, God has given each one certain gifts, but not all, so that we all have a different role to play (just like the members of our body). We are to serve one another and depend upon one another.

According to 1 Pet 4:10, why has God seen to it that everyone has at least one gift?

He has done this as an expression of His grace, and to ensure that we all function in the body of Christ.

Read Eph 4:11-14. Why has God given us spiritual gifts according to this passage?

He has given us spiritual gifts to help equip each other for works of service, to build each other up in Christ's kingdom, to unite us and mature us in Christ, and to help us be stable and settled in Christ.

Sadly, and against God's will, spiritual gifts can lead to disharmony in a church. Why?

Some reasons: denial of gifts; ignorance of them; misuse of them; disobedience to Spirit's leading; envy.

What conclusions can we draw about church life from the Bible's teaching on spiritual gifts?

Since no one has all the gifts, and no gift is given to everyone, we must work together. Those who sit on the side-lines are being disobedient, and those who want to be in the spotlight through gifts are disobedient too.

Summary: Spiritual gifts are given to all Christians for the benefit of all, and for the glory of God.

13. The Church: Spiritual Gifts – Part 1

Aim: To understand each spiritual gift listed in the New Testament, and how it is to be used.

Discuss: Imagine a family with a permanent Christmas tree in their house. Under that tree sits a pile of presents - each one purchased with love and thoughtfulness, carefully wrapped and put under the tree. It would be a shame if the presents remained there, beautifully wrapped but never opened. The receivers would never experience the gifts, the givers would never be appreciated, and the family would never benefit from the blessings of the gifts.

Our church was not designed to be a house full of unwrapped gifts. When we know the gifts God has given us and use them for the common good, the receiver becomes fruitful and fulfilled, the church is blessed, and God is glorified. This study will help us understand what the spiritual gifts are in Eph 4:11, and how they are to be used in the church. In the following studies we will consider the other gifts.

Apostleship (Eph 4:11)

The gift of apostleship was a restricted gift. In what sense? (1 Cor 9:1-2; Rev 21:14)

It was restricted to the Lord Jesus' twelve apostles; those who had been eye-witnesses of the resurrection. Note: Many believe Paul was the twelfth apostle, and not the one the disciples appointed to replace Judas Iscariot in Acts 1:21-26. Paul saw the risen Jesus and was clearly an apostle (1 Cor 15:6-9).

What did a person with the gift of apostleship do? (Acts 1:8; Eph 2:20)

They were witnesses of Christ's death and resurrection, and they had the very important job of laying the foundation of the church, with Jesus being the cornerstone.

Was the term apostle used for others apart from the twelve? In what sense? (Acts 14:14)

Some of Paul's associates were called apostles, because the term can also be used to mean: one sent by the church for a special mission. However, in terms of the gifts, apostleship was restricted to the twelve.

Prophecy (Preaching): A special gift and calling to proclaim a divine message publicly, interpret the times, and to proclaim God's word with power and clarity in a timely manner.

Note: People often equate prophecy with predicting the future. While the gift of prophecy sometimes includes a look into the future through the Scriptures, it is mainly about applying God's truth to the present.

Why do you think Paul placed prophecy in such high esteem? (1 Cor 14:1-5, 24-25)

He saw the benefits it produced for the church. It is for edification (building up), for exhortation (correction and repentance) and for consolation (comfort).

What is the blessing of the gift of prophecy according to 1 Cor 14:23-25?

It has the ability to convict a lost sinner of the reality of God and his own sin, and it can lead them to repent and believe in Jesus; and become a worshipper of God.

Evangelism: The divine enablement to effectively communicate the message of Christ to unbelievers in a winsome way so that they can respond in repentance and faith and be saved.

Philip was an evangelist (Act 21:8). How did he exhibit this gift? (Acts 8:26-40)

He was led by the Spirit and could clearly explain Christ from the Scriptures and lead people to faith.

What's the difference between the gift of evangelism and the responsibility we have to evangelise?

We all are responsible to evangelise (2 Tim 4:5), but some have been enabled to powerfully communicate the message of Christ to others such that God uses them to bring many to Himself (Acts 2:40-41).

Pastoring: The God-given ability to guide, care for, nurture and feed the body of Christ.

What characterises a pastor's heart? (Phil 2:19-21; 2 Cor 11:28)

They have a concern for the welfare of God's people and are moved to do all they can for them.

What metaphor is used to describe the exercising of this gift? (John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:1-4)

A pastor shepherds God's people, copying the Good Shepherd Himself who shepherds His people (Psa 23).

Teaching: The divine gift of being able to understand, clearly explain, and apply the Word of God.

In what ways is a person with the gift of teaching to apply God's truth? (2 Tim 3:16-17)

They use God's Word to teach, bring reproof, correction, and train themselves and others so that God's people may not lack in understanding, but be enabled to live holy lives.

What instructions are given for those who teach in 2 Tim 2:15, Jam 3:1 and 1 Pet 4:11?

Teachers need to be careful that they accurately explain God's Word. If they don't, they can harm God's people, for which God holds them responsible. They are to speak the Word as if God were speaking.

Summary: Through spiritual gifts, God grows and builds up His Church (Eph 4:12-13).